

Rustling

Big Horace had two weeks off for holidays. Sun, sea and stuff. Went to the Isle of Skye. Squiffy and his mum were there. In Squiffy's auntie's B&B just outside Portree. Squiffy was bored. Texted Horace. "Dead loss here. Bring Wee Eck."

Big Horace and Wee Eck come on the bus from Glasgow. "See all they sheeps and cows, Horace?" says Wee Eck, every time the bus goes round a corner. "That's amazing, eh?" Big Horace gives Wee Eck a short lesson in animal husbandry. Wee Eck forced to breath through his mouth for the next hour. Nose very sore.

Horace and Wee Eck book into the B&B. Very quiet. Not much to do between breakfast at 8:30 sharp and a fish supper down by the pier at seven.

Horace has an idea. Could get rich quick. "See these sheeps and cows, Squiffy?" says Horace. Wee Eck takes a step back, protecting his nose. "How much would they sell for in Glasgow?"

Squiffy didn't know, but his auntie could reel off prices that sounded good to Big Horace.

"Eck," says Horace. "Go hire a car."

Wee Eck does a deal with Unrequited Hugh down at the petrol-station. Big fancy car, two day hire, fifty quid all in. Wee Eck and Horace drive along the road out of Portree. Find a picnic-spot. "We havenae any sandwiches," says Wee Eck, confused.

"No matter," says Horace, once more instructing Wee Eck in the weighty matters of animal husbandry. "Now, grab a pair of sheep."

Easier said than done. Was getting dark before they had rounded up four sheep and popped them in the back of Unrequited Hugh's car. Off they go to Glasgow. Sell the sheep for two hundred in the car-park round the back of The Weedgie Cutler. Back up to Portree the next day. Unrequited Hugh none too pleased with the smell. Wee Eck reckons a tenner should cover it.

Next day, Big Horace aims higher. Squiffy's uncle drives an ambulance. Big Horace asks if he can borrow it. Some stroking of chins. Deal is sealed with a hundred quid.

Wee Eck and Big Horace head off down the road. Stop for a picnic. Night falls. Eleven sheep and one Hielan' Coo in the back of the ambulance. Arrive Glasgow around dawn. Straight down to the Maryhill Butcher. Tam Smith works there now. Keeping Harriet the Horse in the manner to which she has been accustomed. Tam's boss likes the price. Four hundred quid for the sheep, two hundred for the cow. No questions asked.

Back up to Portree before dawn, ambulance ready to transport old Mr. McLaggan to Inverness. "Michty me," says the porter at Inverness Hospital. "Those Skye folk - nae sense of cleanliness at all!"

Next day, Wee Eck strikes out on his own. All Unrequited Hugh can offer is a Smart car. "Small, but handy for those tight spots," he says convincingly. Wee Eck falls for the patter. Twenty quid. Wee Eck takes his sandwiches and heads down the road. After three hours work manages to get one sheep in the car. Sheep seizes the steering-wheel, Wee Eck cowers in the back. Get no further than the Skye Bridge, sheep panics. Turns back. Wee Eck is out of pocket.

Big Horace instructs Wee Eck in the matter of ambition. Wee Eck puts raw steak on his eye, then complains to Squiffy. Squiffy keeps his head down.

“The big one tomorrow,” announces Big Horace, packing his suitcase. Suitcase contains all his ill-gottens. Three-fifty so far. A cool grand on its way tomorrow.

“But we’re going home the morrow,” objects Wee Eck, confused.

“Aye,” says Big Horace. “In the bus.”

Big Horace has done a deal with the bus-driver. Two hundred quid in his hand if he’ll stop off at a certain picnic-spot on his way down the road. Bus-driver agrees. Not his bus after all. Nothing against picnics. Two hundred quid will suit him nicely.

Not many passengers the next day. Three old dears and a pair of young Turks from Newcastle. Young Turks already half-cut when the bus sets off. Fall asleep before they’ve got out of town. Bus stops at picnic-spot. “How nice,” say the old dears. They climb out to sniff the fresh air and gather heather.

Big Horace and Wee Eck collect seventeen sheep, two coos and a sheepdog. Bus sets off an hour later. Old dears slightly surprised to see so many animals aboard. Make fuss of dog. Two Turks notice nothing at all.

At Spean Bridge, disaster strikes. Bus-driver stops for a pee. Leaves door open. Sheepdog chases sheep out the door. Two coos follow close on their heels. Big Horace and Wee Eck chase them into the Great Glen. When they come back, bus has gone, along with suitcases.

Crime never pays.